



STATE OF ALASKA

Reorganizing Alaska's Health and Social Services Department FAQs

What is being proposed?

Governor Dunleavy is preparing an Executive Order that would reorganize functions and divisions currently in the Department of Health and Social Services. The Executive Order would be submitted to the Legislature when it convenes in January 2021.

What does the Executive Order change?

Currently, the Department of Health and Social Services has 10 divisions with programs ranging from managing Pioneer Homes, the Office of Children's Services, Adult Protective Services, Infant Learning Programs, Medicaid and Public Assistance, Health Care Facility Licensing, Public Health Nursing, Health Analytics and Vital Statistics, the Health Information Exchange, Juvenile Justice Facilities, Youth Diversion and Probation Programs, Alaska's largest psychiatric hospital, the Alcohol Safety Action Program, the State Medical Examiner, ongoing emergency management and response for natural disasters, as well as coordinating responses to pandemics through the Division of Public Health.

Governor Dunleavy's Executive Order would reorganize the current divisions and functions of the Department of Health and Social Services into two departments:

1. The Department of Health, with the following divisions underneath it:
 - a. Division of Health Care Services
 - b. Division of Public Assistance
 - c. Division of Behavioral Health
 - d. Division of Public Health
 - e. Division of Senior & Disabilities Services

2. The Department of Family and Community Services, with the following divisions underneath it:
 - a. Office of Children's Services
 - b. Division of Juvenile Justice
 - c. Alaska Pioneer Homes
 - d. Alaska Psychiatric Institute

Each department will also have a division for Finance & Management Services.

Why is the Governor using an Executive Order for this change?

The Governor of Alaska oversees the state's executive branch of government, which includes units like DHSS. Alaska's Constitution gives the Governor the ability to organize these units in the interest of efficient administration (Article III, Section 23 "Reorganization").

The Governor can make these changes by issuing an Executive Order, which must be submitted to the Legislature during its regular legislative session. Though it is not a bill, the Executive Order must be submitted to the Legislature for at least 60 days for lawmakers to deliberate the proposed changes in its committees. Unless the Legislature disapproves of the order within 60 days, the Executive Order will become law. This EO will take effect July 1, 2021.

The Alaska Constitution allows the Governor to reorganize the functions of state government. The Governor's charge is to improve outcomes for programs and services statewide.

Have Departments been changed like this before?

Yes, there have been several instances of departmental changes. In 1977, Executive Order 39 created the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities by combining the Department of Highways and the Department of Public Works. In 1984, Executive Order 55 created the Department of Corrections. Governor Hammond used his executive authority to move programs from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Environmental Conservation. Governor Murkowski issued Executive Orders restructuring duties between the Departments of Education and Early Development and Department of Health and Social Services, creating what is today the Division of Behavioral Health, as well as relocating Pioneer Homes from Department of Administration to DHSS.

Why is this change needed?

The current Department of Health and Social Services is responsible for providing many essential services to Alaskans. But if everything is a priority, then nothing can be a priority. The goal of improving the outcomes for the 725,000 Alaskans touched by the department's services is an essential government duty.

By streamlining the focus of the Department of Health on delivery of health care, providing robust health statistics and analysis, and focusing on responsible management of healthcare costs, Alaskans can be healthier, hospitals and providers can be stable and supported, and policymakers can have the information they need to make critical decisions.

By creating the Department of Family and Community Services with a focus on child welfare, family resiliency, and on the 24-hour health services facilities, we can make meaningful interventions for those Alaskans who are experiencing crises or are supporting their loved ones.

The sharpened focus of these two departments means there will be better delivery of essential services to Alaska. For example, the proposed Department of Health would have a new unit dedicated specifically to Health Analytics, Data, and Information Systems, using cutting edge technology to get the very best care in the best time to Alaskans.

What does this mean for people being served by the current Department?

The entire goal of the proposed reorganization is to provide services to Alaskans better, and more efficiently. This announcement kicks off a long timeline. The Executive Order needs to be submitted to the Legislature, and the legislative branch needs time to conduct its due diligence.

Does this mean there will be a new commissioner in the cabinet?

Yes. If the Executive Order goes into effect, Governor Dunleavy would appoint a commissioner to the Department of Family and Community Services. That person would then need to be confirmed by the Legislature to hold that position.

How much is this going to cost?

At this point, the proposed reorganization will amount to minimal additional costs, since all of the units and programs already exist under the larger Department of Health and Social Services.